

WORSE THAN COLOR BLIND

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 122 G'neivas Da'as: Deception and Your Fellow Man. Good Shabbos!

Worse Than Color Blind: Seeing The Color, But Not the Soup

This week's parsha, contains the famous story of the selling of the birthright. Yaakov cooks a pot of lentil soup. Eisav comes in, tired from the field, and says to his brother, "Give me this red stuff you have over here." Yaakov responds, "Sell me as this day (ka'yom) your birthright" [Bereishis 25:30-31].

Eisav was the older brother. He was in line to inherit the spiritual gifts that were passed down from Avrohom through Yitzchak. Yaakov asks Eisav to sell him these rights "ka'yom" (as this day).

The Sforno is bothered by the term "ka'yom". The Sforno's interpretation provides for us a very relevant message.

When Yaakov saw the preoccupation that Eisav had to his mundane profession, that he was so obsessed with 'his own thing' that he couldn't even identify the soup that was being prepared, except by its color, he knew that Eisav had no need for the Bechora (First Born status).

If a person can work to the extent that he comes home so hungry that unlike any normal human being, he can only say about the soup "Give me the red stuff" then he is a person for whom the only thing that matters is 'Today' (ka'yom). He is so preoccupied with his activities that he can't even recognize a bowl of soup! If that is how involved he is in the work of today, he has no need or interest in the Service of G-d, which is inherent in the rights of the First Born.

This is what Yaakov meant. "If Today (ka'yom) is so important to you then you can't be the Bechor. You can't expect to serve G-d the way the Master of the World has in mind."

What the Sforno is saying is that there is a basic dichotomy between that which is spiritual and that which is temporal. A person can get so involved in his work, in his career, that nothing else matters besides 'Today'. When 'making partner' becomes the top priority, when being successful in one's profession is all that matters, one only has 'Today'. Family loses its importance, spirituality loses its

importance, the relationship with everything that is of lasting and eternal value is severed. A life of 'Today' precludes a life of holiness.

Eisav was the ultimate 'career person', the ultimate 'workaholic'. He came back from his work so consumed, so obsessed, that he could not even recognize a bowl of soup. Yaakov recognized that Eisav had no connection to the Tent of Spirituality and no need for the Bechora.

Yitzchak Foregoes the Well to Preserve His Spiritual Well Being

Later in the parsha, Yitzchak had an incident with the wells. "And Yitzchak returned and redug the wells that were dug in the days of Avraham which had been filled up by the Philistines after the death of Avraham... And the herdsman of Gerar argued with Yitzchak's herdsman saying 'The water is ours', so he called the name of the well 'Esek' because they had this involvement (hisasku) with him. Then they dug another well..." [Bereishis 26:18-21].

Rav Avrohom the son of the Ramba"m says: "The acts of the fathers are signposts - provide an indication for - the children." Why did the Torah have to tell us that the well was called Esek? Is it so significant to the history of the Jewish people what this well was called? Who cares?

Rav Avrohom ben Ha-Rambam answers that 'Esek' means an involvement. The Patriarchs, with their great wealth and abundance of property, were not 'involved' in business matters. It did not make a difference to them if their investments were prospering or not. If it was a 'hassle' for them, they didn't want it. Their real 'involvement' - the area where they truly expended effort - was strictly in spiritual matters.

When a dispute arose concerning this well, when the well involved going to court and getting involved in the 'nitty-gritty' of financial matters, Yitzchak called it 'Esek'. The name means, "It's a hassle." Yitzchak said, I want nothing to do with such things; I don't have time for such matters. This is not what my life is about. Let's go find another well!

This is the 'Act of the Fathers' which should be an indication and a guide for the actions of the descendants.

When One's Presence Is the Greatest Mussar Schmooze

The regular Haftorah for Parshas Toldos (which we will not read in 5758 because Toldos is Mochor Chodesh) is from the prophet Malachi. Malachi chastises the Jews in general and the Kohanim in particular for treating the Temple Service in a less than an honorable fashion. That, in fact, is the connection between the Haftorah and the Parsha.

The Haftorah begins "Is not Esav a brother to Yaakov..." [Malachi 1:2]. "Why out of the twin brothers,"

G-d says, "did I pick Yaakov and reject Eisav?" As we said earlier, Yaakov was a person of spirituality and Eisav was a person of physicality. "That", says G-d, "is why I picked you, Klal Yisroel."

That is why it is all the more disgraceful when Israel's own Kohanim, the people who are supposed to represent spirituality, do not do their Service properly. They have become in effect Eisav and not Yaakov."

The prophet goes on to give chastisement to these Kohanim whose actions were less than appropriate. He concludes by describing what a true Kohain should be:

"The teaching of truth was in his mouth and no obscenity (avlah) was found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and fairness, and he turned many away from sin" [2:6].

Everything fits nicely in this verse with the exception of four words. Among the list of wonderful praises described here is the expression "and no obscenity (avlah) was found on his lips".

This seems a bit out of place. This is how we describe the quintessential Kohain? Does the prophet have nothing better to say about him than he doesn't speak obscenities?

I once heard from Rav Nissan Alpert, zt"l, the following thought which he said at the eulogy of his Rebbe, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l:

There are some people who don't have to give mussar.

Every community has to have a person who gives them mussar. How is mussar given? The person who is giving mussar goes ahead and bawls out the members of the community: "You shouldn't do this, you shouldn't do that, etc."

There is however, a type of individual who doesn't have to say a word of mussar. His essence, his being, is the greatest mussar schmooze. To be within his four cubits is the lecture of chastisement. To see a person such as Rav Moshe Feinstein, to see his humility, to see his refinement (ehrllichkeit), to see the Fear of Heaven, to see the Love of Israel -- not a word had to be spoken!

This is what the prophet means. The Kohain described was 'ehrllichkeit' personified. And even when he had to give mussar, there was no need to have to say an 'avlah', to issue harsh reprimands. To be in this man's presence was the ultimate mussar schmooze.

That is the Kohain and the spiritual leader that the prophet describes -- one who does not need to utter a word of admonishment. His presence was the biggest inspiration for one to better oneself.

Personalities & Sources:

Sforno -- Rav Ovadiah Sforno (1470-1550); Bible Commentary. Rome and Bologna, Italy.

Rav Avraham ben HaRambam -- (1186-1237) Successor to his father, Rav Moshe ben Maimon

(Ramba"m) as Naggid and Chief Rabbi of Egyptian Jewry.

Rav Nissan Alpert -- Maggid Shiur at Yeshivas Rabbenu Yitzchak Elchanan; Disciple and neighbor of Rav Moshe Feinstein; Died shortly after Rav Moshe. Authored Limudei Nissan (Bible Commentary).

Rav Moshe Feinstein -- (1895-1986); Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem, New York; Authored Igros Moshe (Responsa), Dibros Moshe (Talmud Commentary), and Darash Moshe (Bible Commentary).

Glossary:

Bechor(a) -- Status of being First Born.

Kohain -- Priest

Mussar Schmooze -- Lecture exhorting the audience to improve themselves

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